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ABSTRACT

An instrument was developed to measure the attitudes of public school board members on issues such as the expenditure of additional local money for various programs and services, the determination of teacher raises, and required minimum proficiency tests for high school graduation. A total of 66 completed questionnaires was usable from the 112 sent to school board members in 20 counties in middle Tennessee. An item by item summary of the results is supplied, with the level of significance of the data identified by the chi square test. (MLF)

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ATTITUDES OF MEMBERS OF BOARDS OF EDUCATION OF PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEMS IN MIDDLE TENNESSEE CONCERNING PUBLIC SCHOOL FINANCIAL ISSUES

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Introduction

The constitution of the United States is silent on the matter of education. Consequently, education became a state function through interpretation of the Tenth Admendment to the United States Constitution. ("The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.") In Tennessee legislative enactment, constitutional authority, and judicial decisions have established boards of education to manage and control public school systems at the local level. (Tennessee Code Annotated, Volume 9, Title 49, Sections 201-253.)

Statement of the Problem

This study was concerned with the attitudes of members of boards of education of public school systems in Middle Tennessee concerning various public school financial issues.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it measured and analyzed the attitudes of public school board members. School board members determine the policies under which public school systems operate. Therefore, the ideas and attitudes of board members on financial issues is helpful in understanding why public school financial policies are what they are now - and what they will be in the future.

The information from this study should be helpful to teachers and administrators in understanding why present financial policies were formulated

in determining attitudinal differences among the groups, and as a basis for planning strategies to inform or persuade board members of their ideas concerning financial policies.

Research Procedures

The research methods used in this study began with a review of professional literature concerning financial issues in public schools and of the policy-making role of school board members. An instrument was developed to measure the attitudes of public school board members on issues such as the expenditure of additional local money for various programs and services, determining teacher raises, and required minimum proficiency tests for high school graduation.

The questionnaire was administered to the 112 school board members in twenty counties in Middle Tennessee. A total of 67 questionnaires were completed and returned. (66 were usable.) The "Statistical Package for the Social Sciences" program was used for computer analysis of the data. Chi square was used to determine the level of significance of the data.

Summary of the Results

An item by item summary of the results follows:

Questionnaire item 1. Would you support the expenditure of additional local money to: (yes or no)

Results:

Type of Expenditure	% Yes	% No	Chi Square	Level of Significance
Improve discipline	54.5	45.5	0.55	N.S.
Lower pupil-teacher ratios	69.7	30.3	10.24	.01
Increase Instruction-Reading-basic skills	86.6	13.4	35.83	.001

Expand Athletics	35.4	64.6	5.55	.05
Support clubs, band, and other such activity	33.8	66.2	6.78	.01
Insure continued operation of transportation program	74.6	25.4	16.25	.05
Improve inservice training for teachers	68.7	31.3	9.32	.01
Eliminate over-crowded classrooms	87.9	12.1	37.88	.001
Increase teacher salaries each year at rate of inflation	70.1	29.9	10.88	.001
Improve routine maintenance of school buildings and grounds	82.1	17.9	27.59	.001

For expenditures which may be categorized as "instructional," school board members indicated that they would support additional expenditures of local monies. For example, to eliminate over-crowded classrooms (87.9%), increase instruction-reading and basic skills (86.6%), lower pupil-teacher ratios (69.7%), and improve inservice training (68.7%). Board members also showed support for auxiliary support (i.e. continue operation of transportation (74.6%) and improve routine maintenance (82.1%). The school board members indicated they did not favor additional expenditures of local funds "to expand athletics" (64.6% negative) or to "support clubs, bands and other such activity" (66.2% negative). They did favor improving teachers salaries, "increase teachers salaries each year" (70.1%). There was no discernible difference in their attitudes toward the expenditure of additional local funds requiring the improvement of discipline.

Questionnaire item 2. Are you satisfied with the amount of money that is made available to the schools in your community? Circle one: 1. Yes 2. No

Results:

1. Yes = 16 (23.9%) 2. No = 51 (76.1%)
   Chi square = 18.28 Significance Level = .001

It was the majority opinion (76.1%) of the school board members that present levels of funding for public education are inadequate.

Questionnaire item 3. Do you think that the school board should be able to levy taxes for school purposes instead of the County Commission (or other local fiscal body). Circle one: 1. Yes 2. No.

Results:

1. Yes = 30 (45.5%) 2. No = 36 (54.5%)
   Chi square = 0.55 Not significant

There was no significant difference between the group answering yes and the group responding no. A majority of board members responding believed that the school boards in middle Tennessee should not be authorized to levy taxes for school purposes. It was concluded that the local boards of education was not ready to assume total fiscal independence.

Questionnaire item 4. Consider the types of taxes listed below and rank from 1-5 your preference of how education should be funded in Tennessee. (1 = highest preference, 5 = lowest preference)

Results:

Type of Tax	Median level of Preference	Rank
Sales Tax	2.10	1
Alcohol-Tobacco	2.75	2
Local Property tax	2.90	3
Wheel tax	3.50	4
State Income Tax	4.35	5

In Middle Tennessee, property tax accounts for approximately 75% of local contributions to public school budgets. In Tennessee the maximum sales tax rate is 4.5¢ state with a local option of 2.75¢. At the state level sales tax accounts for approximately .50 per dollar of tax collected. Alcohol and tobacco tax only accounts for approximately 5¢ per $1.00 collected. The board members lowest preference for funding education was the state income tax.

Questionnaire item 5. Based on present sources of funding, if additional money is needed for operating schools, rank in order of preference, 1-5, your choice of securing additional funds. (1 = highest preference, 5 = lowest preference)

Results:

Type of Tax	Median level of Preference	Rank
Sales Tax	2.30	1
Alcohol-Tobacco	2.31	2
Wheel Tax	2.81	3
Local Property tax	3.41	4
State Income Tax	4.21	5

The sales tax, however regressive, was first choice for additional funding. The wheel tax was preferred above local property tax and state income tax.

Questionnaire item 6. Which do you think should provide most (over 50%) of the money to finance the operation of public schools? 1. Local government 2. State government 3. Federal government

Results:

1.	Local government	13 (19.4%)
2.	State government	39 (58.2%)
3.	Federal government	15 (22.4%)

Chi square = 18.75
Significant at .001 level

The board members perceived the primary funding of public education to be a state function.

Questionnaire item 7. Would you be willing to pay more money in taxes so that schools would not need to raise money through magazine drives, candy sales, and such activities? Circle one: 1. Yes 2. No

Results:

1. Yes = 42 (63.6%) 2. No = 24 (36.4%)
Chi square = 4.91 Significant at .05 level

A majority (63.6%) of the board members responding favored paying additional taxes to raising funds through magazine drives, candy sales, and such activities.

Questionnaire item 8. Which of the following methods would be best for determining salary increases for teachers? (Check one: merit, across the board increases, training and experience, or cost of living.)

Results:

Salary Determination	%	Rank
Training and Experience	34.8	1
Merit	25.8	2
Cost of living	16.7	3
Combination of the factors	12.1	4
Across the board	10.6	5

Questionnaire item 9. In your opinion, should students in secondary schools be permitted to graduate only if they can pass the state required proficiency examination? Circle one: 1. Yes 2. No

Results:

1. Yes = 27 (40.3%) 2. No = 40 (59.7%)
   Chi square = 2.52 Not significant

The State Board of Education, governing K-12 education in Tennessee, mandated passing a required proficiency test as a prerequisite to receiving a high school diploma (Rules, Regulations, and Minimum Standards, State Board of Education, State of Tennessee, 0520-1-3-.06-1a.) A majority of local school board members in middle Tennessee do not believe that students should graduate only after passing the required proficiency test.

Questionnaire item 10. Would you be willing to finance remedial instruction programs for students who do not pass the state required proficiency examination?

1. Yes 2. No

Results:

1. Yes = 46 (68.7%) 2. No = 21 (31.3%)
   Chi square = 9.33 Significance at .01 level

The board members responding indicated their support (68.7%) for remedial instructional programs for those students who have difficulty with the mandated proficiency test.

APPENDIX

What is your opinion regarding the following issues related to public school finance?

1. Would you support the expenditure of additional local money to:

(Circle yes or no)

Yes No Improve discipline

Yes No Lower pupil-teacher ratio

Yes No Increase instruction in reading and basic skills

Yes No Expand athletics

Yes No Support clubs, bands and other such activities

Yes No Insure continued operation of your transportation program

Yes No Improve in-service training for teachers

Yes No Eliminate over-crowded classrooms

Yes No Increase teacher salaries each year at rate of inflation

Yes No Improve routine maintenance of school buildings and grounds

2. Are you satisfied with the amount of money that is made available to the schools in your community?

Circle one: Yes No

3. Do you think that the school board should be able to levy taxes for school purposes instead of the County Commission (or other local fiscal body).

Circle one: Yes No

4. Consider the types of taxes listed below and rank from 1-5 your preference of how education should be funded in Tennessee.

____ Local Property tax ____ Sales tax ____State Income tax

____ Wheel tax ____Alconol Tobacco tax

5. Based on present levels of funding, if additional money is needed for operating schools, rank in order of preference (1-5) your choice of securing additional funds.

____ Local Property tax ____Sales tax ____State Income tax

____Wheel tax ____ Alcohol-Tobacco tax

6. Who do you think should provide most (over 50%) of the money to finance the operation of public schools?

____ Local Government ____State Government ____Federal Government

7. Would you be willing to pay more money in taxes so that schools would not need to raise money through magazine drives, candy sales, and such activities?

Circle one: Yes No

8. Which of the following methods would be best for determining salary raises for teachers?

Check one: ____ merit

____ across the board increases

____ training and experience

____ cost of living

9. In your opinion, should pupils in secondary schools be permitted to graduate only if they can pass the state required proficiency examination?

Circle one: Yes No

10. Would you be willing to finance remedial instruction programs for students who do not pass the state required proficiency examination?

Circle one: Yes No